

# TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

***Crosstalk: Canadian and Global Imaginaries in Dialogue* edited by Diana Brydon and Marta Dvořák (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012)**

*Crosstalk* addresses the intersections of Canadian literature and culture within the context of citizenship, globalization, and cosmopolitanism. The chapters and contributing authors are in dialogue, talking across 'the differently constituted borders of nation, discipline, and genre to draw attention to some of the conflicts within Canadian – and international – literary studies today' (8). The collection aims to critically explore some of the intricacies involved in reading multiple voices in Canadian literature over national and global territories, and offers new critical insights in the understanding of Canadian literature, with a particular focus on the themes of collaboration, voice and space. As the editors note, the chapters in the book 'develop different, and sometimes contradictory, views of the ways that ... shifting relations between national and global imaginaries interact with cultural, theoretical, and literary imaginaries' (2). Furthermore, they complicate the ways in which Canadian imaginaries are constantly altered as a result of global shifts. The book is divided into three parts: 1) Collaboration, Crosstalk, Improvisation 2) Dialogism, Polyphony, Voice, and 3) Space, Place and Circulation. Each section, in different ways, deals with the complexity of Canadian literature – as it is more commonly coming to be understood – as a literature that encompasses the plurality of a culturally diverse nation.

In the first section, in their chapter 'Voicing the Unforeseeable: Improvisation, Social Practice, Collaborative Research', Ajay Heble and Winfried Siemerling discuss the interrelationship of literature and other media, and the current dynamics of collaborative research. Providing details about their research initiative on musical improvisation which may present a model for the coming together of theory and practice, they assert that new 'methodological paradigms [can] emerge [only when we] foster genuinely interdisciplinary research' (50). This is followed by two articles, one by Daniel Coleman and the other by Ric Knowles, who both separately discuss different indigenous histories and literatures. Coleman uses the theory of melancholia and investigates the 'residual effects of historical colonial trauma', and the role of 'spiritual cosmology' in attending to the past (53). Likewise, Knowles's reading of *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*, Monique Mojica's collaborative theatre and research project, extends an example of the way literature and performance can become tools for healing and moving forward from the wounds of the colonial past. In another chapter, arguing that 'all literary writing is in some sense collaborative' (95), Alison Calder uses the example of the poetry group 'Pain Not Bread' and explores polyphonic readings of poetry and the construction of 'the relation between artist, material, and audience' (95).

Focusing on dialogic and polyphonic voices, the second section includes five chapters on works by Canadian authors such as Dionne Brand, Larissa Lai, Hiromi Goto, and Margaret Atwood. As she studies texts by J.M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, Lloyd Jones and others, Marta Dvořák's chapter looks at the construction of cultural narratives and the process of canonization in current consumerist society, since multiple forms of fictions, including visual and audial, have now destabilized the place of 'the hypotexts often referred to as master narratives' (111). Frank Davey, in the next chapter, reads the poetries of the group 'The Four Horseman' as simultaneously Canadian and global. Chapters by Pilar Cuder-Dominguez and Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida engage with the questions of cosmopolitan citizenship and Canadian diasporic communities.

Section three focuses on the intertwining of the local and the global. It includes two chapters on Jane Urquhart's texts, a reading of Robert LePage's *The Dragon's Trilogy*, a chapter on South Asian

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culture, and a discussion of the Hérouxville debate. Claire Omhové and Catherine Lanone, in their respective chapters, provide readings of landscape and the questions of space, place, and time in Urquhart's work. Chelva Kanaganayakam, in his article on South Asian culture, discusses the concept of 'home' and 'the ways in which "home" is affected and transformed by the diaspora' and the two-way cultural exchange – from Canada to South Asia and vice versa (242). Diana Brydon provides an interesting analysis of the now ill-famous Hérouxville declaration<sup>1</sup> for immigrants, and argues that one needs to read the declaration 'within translocal terms' and not simply as 'rural Quebec's nostalgia for a simpler and more homogenous past' so that culturalism may be understood broadly and within global settings (253).

Boundaries of Canadian literature have witnessed considerable transference since the 1980s. The implementation of the Multiculturalism Act and newly invigorated discourses around the nation-state saw the emergence of aboriginal and new immigrant writers rendering Canadian literature more diverse than ever before. As dialogues about the nation, identity, integration, and multiculturalism continue to generate debates, scholars continue to situate and resituate Canadian literature and culture not only within the framework of these debates but also broadly in the context of postcolonialism, globalization, diaspora and transnationalism. Many recent works, by scholars such as Smaro Kambourelli, Cynthia Sugars, Laura Moss, Roy Miki, Rosemary Chapman, Imre Szeman, George Elliott Clarke, and E. D. Blodgett among others, have identified the changing trajectories of Canadian literature and Canadian literary and cultural history. *Crosstalk* complements and adds to this ongoing discourse. However, as a comparatist who works on heritage language literatures in Canada, I would be interested in seeing the boundaries of this crosstalk pushed even further to include literatures written in other languages, and moving towards a globaleclectical reading – to invoke Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's term – of Canadian literature. Canada has a cosmopolitan mix of authors writing in a variety of languages but, to date, these authors remain marginalized; Canadian literary scholarship would be richer for their inclusion in this ongoing crosstalk.

The fifteen articles in *Crosstalk* were originally written for a workshop 'Voice and Vision: Situating Canadian Culture Globally' held in 2008 at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris. The collection, as a whole, is cohesive, and could be seen as an example of a collaborative project examining texts across cultures, genres, and authors/performers, and finding meaning through crosstalk. The book is a very valuable resource for scholars interested in Canadian literature, diaspora studies, globalization, migration and multiculturalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Hérouxville, a small Quebec town with mostly white, Catholic, Francophone population, in 2007, in the context of argument over 'reasonable accommodation' of immigrants, passed a declaration for potential new immigrants to Quebec. The proposed code of behaviour became widely controversial as it was perceived to be racist, fostering cultural stereotypes, and meant to keep immigrants away.